

Fez. A few days after his arrival in the Moorish capital the Sultan rejected the French reform proposals, and invited the signatories of the Treaty of 1880 to a conference at Tangier*.

The invitation required an immediate reply, and Delcassé urged that it should be declined. The Foreign Minister had reigned at the Quai d'Orsay for seven years, and had been allowed a free hand in foreign affairs while the Dreyfus case was being liquidated and while Waldeck-Rousseau and Combes were wrestling with the Church. The Tangier demonstration* however, had at last compelled Ministers to lift their eyes from domestic controversies, and Rouvier, the Premier, held very definite ideas as to Franco-German relations. A disciple of Gambetta and an expert in international finance, he had no mind to allow France to be dragged into a hopeless struggle over Morocco. Delcassé, it was clear, would have to resign. The air was thick with rumours of an ultimatum. At the decisive Cabinet, held on June 6, Delcassé argued that France could not go to a Conference without humiliation, that Germany was bluffing, and that he had just received the offer of an alliance from Great Britain. Rouvier, who took the German threats very seriously, replied that the Conference must be accepted. He was supported by all his colleagues, and the Foreign Minister, after warning them that their pusillanimity would encourage German insolence, withdrew and resigned. Rouvier's decision was inevitable, for the Ministers of Defence testified that France was totally unprepared for war, and the British offer of armed support was a legend. It is an axiom of statesmanship that diplomacy should never outpace military preparations.¹

On the fall of Delcassé Rouvier took over the Foreign Office, and explained to the German Government

that he could only consent to a Conference if a preliminary understanding on reforms Were reached. " If our proposals are accepted, all the Powers will benefit. We think a Conference dangerous without previous agreement and useless with it. But we do not definitely decline." It would indeed have been dangerous to do so, as the French Ambassador in Berlin suggested after an alarming conversation with the Chancellor. " He was very courteous, but he explained the necessity not to let this *question mai4vaise> tres mawaise*, drag on, and not to linger on a road *borde de prtcipicts et m\$me d'abimes*. His insistence on an

¹A detailed account of this dramatic Cabinet meeting by Chaumif, the Minister of Public Instruction, is printed in D.D.F., Deuxierne.Sene, VI, 601-4.